

Easter - March 31, 2024

Communion Services 9:00am and 11:00am

John 20:1-18

“I have seen the Savior”

1. We've grown accustomed to breaking news reaching us
 - a. Some time back, it would have been a TV news anchor interrupting our favorite show to tell us about newsworthy events
 - b. These days news ping our phones, with stories from around the world
 - c. Often stunning images accompany the articles, taken by professional photojournalists, or maybe they're shaky videos shot by citizens who just happen to have a front row seat to witness and share history unfolding before them.
 - d. We might not think of it, but we depend on people from the community, our neighbors, to share news with us.
 - e. It is our neighbors who would have run to tell us there was a fire in a neighbor's house, or who would have called us to tell us about our relative being in an accident.
 - f. It would seem that mostly the news we get as breaking news would be alarming news, even bad news.
2. Such was the case for our Gospel story today. It begins with bad news.
 - a. For us Easter morning is a joyful morning, of beautiful music in church, of family gathered, with kids in spiffy new outfits looking for treats hiding around the house.
 - b. But the biblical passage didn't start that way.
 - c. It starts very much as the previous week had ended: With the heavy feeling of knowing that their teacher and friend had been killed by the occupying Roman forces.
 - d. In this retelling, Mary Magdalene had gone to the tomb to remember, to grieve.
 - e. But she discovered a shocking scene: the tomb that had been opened and Jesus' body was missing.
 - f. Then begins the running. There is a lot of running in this story
 - g. I picture Mary Magdalene crying and sprinting from the grave to the disciples. It's hard enough to run fast, I can't imagine trying to do it while sobbing.
 - h. Her message to the disciples is all in a panic: “They've taken the Messiah out of the tomb and we do not know where they've laid him.” Grave robbers.
 - i. The disciple Jesus loved and Peter receive the news and they too run.
 - ii. Peter the old man trails behind. The other disciple gets there first, but hesitates going into the tomb.
 - iii. Peter, the stubborn and impulsive one walks right in. No body.
 - iv. They notice neatly folded burial clothes. An odd thing for a robber to do, no?
 - v. They walk home. Believing the absence. Not understanding the presence.
 - i. No one understood the presence yet.
3. Mary walks back, taking her time making her way to the garden, her eyes flooding with tears of grief, anguish.
 - a. The scene is essentially the same as what Peter and the other disciple found, but now the tomb is crowded. Two angels are in there. She doesn't ask them: who are you or why are you in there? But they ask her: Why are you crying?

- b. Even Jesus, whom she doesn't recognize amid her tears, asks the same question and adds, Whom are you looking for?
 - c. Now she asks the question: where did you all put the body?
 - d. She was looking for a dead body dumped irreverently somewhere
 - e. She knelt there in front of an empty tomb looking for the past while the future, the risen Jesus, was right next to her, so close she could touch him.
 - f. And when Jesus calls her by name, her tears of grief mingle with tears of joy.
 - g. My teacher! She cries and goes to try to hug him.
 - h. Jesus knows she's still trying to hold on to the past, and knows she is still not understanding he's the future not the past. So he says "do not hold me" or "hold on to me" but instead, go and tell my siblings I'm returning to Go, Jesus orders her.
 - i. And once again running back, Mary Magdalene gets to preach, breathlessly, the first Easter sermon: I have seen the Savior!
4. Even though Easter is a day of Good News, we have nevertheless managed to domesticate its message over the centuries.
- a. We can fall for a trap of talking about it only with high theological notions that talk about Salvation from our sins, or talking about it as simple some sort of Spring rite of passage, the pretty flowers blooming on our garden.
 - b. We don't feel right talking about resurrection as we still grieve the death of a loved one, or about getting back on our feet after losing a job, or about change in the life of someone who sits in prison or who is forced to sleep in their car.
 - c. How can we look for resurrection in everyday circumstances?
 - i. Life is in the eye of the beholder, if you would
 - ii. If a teacher believes a student is able to learn, they will find it is so. And tragically the moment the teacher gives up on the student, they won't see how it's possible for them to turn it around
 - iii. If a community sees itself as a community of equals, it will be so. But if we give up on someone because their politics are polar opposites to ours, it's hard to see we have much more in common than what could separate us.
 - iv. If we trust that a neighbor is doing the best they can with what they have, we trust them. But if we blame a neighbor for their plight (rightly or wrongly) and we don't picture ourselves as part of a solution for them, then we've only seen what we were expecting to see.
 - v. No surprise. No shock. No resurrection.
 - vi. As Jesus asked Mary: Whom are we looking for?
 - d. We don't get in today's reading the third act of the play, when after Mary has proclaimed a Risen Savior, then the other disciples suddenly see life and resurrection everywhere they look.
 - i. That's because that third act takes forever to arrive
 - ii. Even when she's brought the breaking news, their expectations are as buried as the body used to be.
 - iii. Not so with Mary. She's seeing resurrection and new life everywhere.

5. Then we become like Mary, witnessing and even actively grieving the tragedies of life, and we ponder: and now I wonder how God will bring life out of this?
 - a. I wonder how God will use me to break the news to someone that death and mourning and pain are not the last word, are never the last word?
 - b. Not in a dismissive way, but really like Mary Magdalene, with tears of grief mingling with tears of joy.
 - c. On this Easter morning, would you help me preach this sermon? Do it by saying together the words of that first Easter sermon: I have seen the Savior!
 - d. I have seen the Savior.
 - i. I have seen the Savior turn things around miraculously.
 - ii. I have seen the Savior not give up on people.
 - iii. I have seen the Savior turn desperation into hope.
 - iv. I have seen the Savior bring a community together to rebuild after a flood and to welcome in its midst refugees from the other side of the world.
 - e. Would you help preach this sermon tomorrow and the day after that?
 - f. I have seen the Savior. I have seen the Savior.